

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Supports Second Term for U.N.'s Ban Ki-moon

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama supports U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's bid for a second term as head of the world's largest international organization, the White House said June 7.

"Under Ban's leadership, the United Nations has played a critical role in responding to crises and challenges across the globe, including most recently supporting democratic transitions in Côte d'Ivoire and earthquake-affected Haiti, the conduct of the referendum on South Sudan's self-determination, and efforts to resolve the political and humanitarian crisis in Libya," White House press secretary Jay Carney said in a prepared statement.

At a June 6 press conference, Ban formally announced he was seeking a second five-year term.

"This morning, I sent a letter to the membership of the General Assembly and the Security Council, offering, humbly, myself for consideration for a second term as secretary-general of the United Nations," Ban told reporters at U.N. headquarters in New York.

"Throughout my time in office, I have sought to be a bridge-builder — among the member states, within the United Nations system and among a rich diversity of global partners," Ban added. "Finding common ground is central to delivering results."

He has already won the support of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States — but the final decision rests with the entire U.N. General Assembly. The South Korean foreign minister from 2004 to 2006, Ban began his first term in January 2007.

"The United Nations is an imperfect but indispensable institution," Carney said. "The secretary general has made important reforms, such as increasing the hiring of women to senior posts and proposing the deepest reduction in the U.N.'s budget in more than a decade."

Carney's statement said the United States "strongly supports further efforts for reform to improve effectiveness, streamline bureaucracy, reduce costs, and update business practices to improve the United Nations' ability to meet its mandate to promote global peace and security, human rights and development."

U.S., Germany Say European Debt Cannot Put World Economy at Risk

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says that Greece's indebtedness has forced it into a tough economic situation, but the United States and Germany are in agreement that financial difficulties in Europe cannot be allowed to put the overall global economic recovery at risk.

Speaking with German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the White House June 7, Obama said Greece is taking "some difficult steps" to improve its economic situation, but the country is facing pressure from international capital markets, and he urged its partners in the European Union to help.

"As a member of the euro zone, they necessarily are going to be looking to other members of the euro zone to help them figure out a path forward," Obama said, adding that Germany, Europe's largest economy, "is going to be a key leader in that process."

The president said it is difficult for all 27 members of the European Union to agree on how to prevent a financial meltdown due to economic challenges among some of the member states, but said the United States wants to support their efforts and sees its own economic growth as being dependent upon "a sensible resolution of this issue."

"We think it would be disastrous for us to see an uncontrolled spiral and default in Europe, because that could trigger a whole range of other events. And I think Angela shares that same view," Obama said.

The president urged Greece to make structural reforms and allow greater transparency in its economic system, and urged other Europeans to recognize the need for Greece to grow, which will require private investment.

Greece's level of debt "also means that other countries in the euro zone are going to have to provide them a backstop and support," he said, adding that those holding Greek debt "are going to have to make some decisions, working with the European countries in the euro zone about how that debt is managed."

Obama expressed confidence that Germany and other European countries will help Greece find a way to start growing its economy again and for its debt to become more manageable.

"It's going to require some patience and some time, and we have pledged to cooperate fully in working through

these issues, both on a bilateral basis but also through international and financial institutions" such as the International Monetary Fund, Obama said.

Europe, the United States and the world economy came close to "complete disaster" in 2008, and the recovery will still take time and be uneven, he said.

"Our task is to not panic, not overreact, to make sure that we've got a plan, a path forward in terms of how we make our economies competitive; making sure we're dealing with the structural issues and the basic fundamentals that will allow us to grow and create a good, sound business environment," Obama said.

For its part, the United States acknowledges the importance of controlling its own debt and trade deficit while also finding ways to invest in education, infrastructure and clean energy, the president said.

"Our job is to set a course for the medium and the long term that assures that not only both our economies grow, but the world economy is stable and prosperous. And I think we can do that together," he told Merkel.

The German chancellor said the global economic crisis showed "how interdependent we are," and that Europeans are aware that the stability of the euro zone is "an important factor of stability for the whole of the global economy."

Germany's assistance to Greece comes through the awareness that one European country in danger endangers the euro as a whole, and that it is in each country's interest to make sure that the "common currency area is not endangered."

"We will act in such a way ... that sustainability is guaranteed," Merkel said.

Nuclear Watchdog Calls for Iran's Cooperation on Nuclear Arms

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — The head of the international nuclear watchdog agency says Iran isn't cooperating in the investigation of substantial evidence that the country has military dimensions to its nuclear program — and President Obama says that could mean more sanctions.

"Iran is not providing the necessary cooperation to enable the agency to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities," Yukiya Amano, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency

(IAEA), told the IAEA Board of Governors at the start of a weeklong meeting June 6 in Vienna.

Iran has said that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, but the United States and other countries have challenged that assertion. Iran is under international sanctions for failing to meet what Amano called "all relevant obligations in order to establish international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear program."

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said at a news conference June 7 in Tehran that despite Amano's comments, there is nothing the international community can put forward to induce Iran to cease enriching uranium.

China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States have expressed disappointment after previous meetings with Iran over its nuclear program. Following a White House meeting June 7 with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Obama told reporters: "We agreed that Iran's continuing nuclear program and its refusal to engage in any meaningful talks with the international community remain a very serious concern. So we agreed that if the International Atomic Energy Agency this week determines again that Iran is continuing to ignore its international obligations, then we will have no choice but to consider additional steps, including potentially additional sanctions, to intensify the pressure on the Iranian regime."

Amano referred to a report submitted by IAEA experts to the board a week earlier. It raised questions on whether Iran has been working on technology necessary to build nuclear warheads. Iran has denied pursuing that technology. Amano said the evidence suggests "the existence of possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear program. There are indications that certain of these activities may have continued until recently."

Amano also said the IAEA has concluded that a secret site in Dair Alzour, Syria — destroyed by an Israeli bombing raid in 2007 — "was a nuclear reactor which should have been declared to the agency."

"It is deeply regrettable that the facility was destroyed — allegedly by Israel — without the agency having been given an opportunity to perform its verification role. Rather than force being used, the case should have been reported to the IAEA," Amano said.

Egyptian American Promotes Civil Society Activism and Dialogue

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Like many Egyptians living abroad, New York resident Ahmed Fathi doubted that political change would ever come in Egypt.

Then in June 2010, police in Alexandria allegedly beat to death a 28-year-old man. Fathi, along with millions of other Egyptians, began to speak out.

"I think that the central incident that motivated me to push forward was the killing of the young man in Alexandria, Khaled Said," Fathi said. "That was probably the igniting point for me that I decided to take a much more active role in removing this regime."

On June 13 at 1 p.m. EDT (17:00 GMT), Fathi will share his expertise on organizing and launching initiatives via a webcast available at <https://statedept.connectsolutions.com/arabiclanguage>.

A travel professional who serves as a consultant to investors in tourism development, Fathi has called the United States his home for 15 years. He said his late father had given him a belief in democracy by voting in Egyptian elections, and just before Said's death, he attended the Alliance of Egyptian Americans (AEA) conference in New York.

The AEA's interest in democracy and its role as an active, nonsectarian, nonpartisan association led by Egyptian Americans inspired Fathi. The association's mission, he said, is to promote "true democracy, sustainable development and social justice in Egypt and empower Egyptian Americans in their new communities."

"It was not a one-man show, it was serious, they had activities on the ground — all were motivations for me to take a bigger role with them," Fathi said. Today, Fathi is a regional coordinator for the group.

Fathi, who helped organize rallies in New York to support Egyptian democracy, is also active in promoting dialogue online. In 2010, he launched Egyptian Liberals on PalTalk.com and Facebook.

"It is a virtual discussion group. It is a chat group. We have a discussion almost daily," Fathi said. "It started as a discussion group, or a chat group, and we are hoping to turn it one day into a think tank."

The moderator, guest speakers and users of the site present discussion topics on Egypt. Participants talk about topics as diverse as harnessing solar energy, road

safety and transparency in government.

"We have lively debates almost every single day," Fathi said. "Since it is multidisciplinary, we have people from all walks of life."

Egyptian Liberals is not limited to North America or Egypt: Users join in from around the world, and dialogues can last hours at a time. Most discourse is in Arabic, but some users comment in English and French.

"We also use it as a tool to educate people about dialogue, about freedom, about human rights," Fathi said, adding that Arabs from other countries in the Middle East and North Africa participate. "We take very progressive positions — about the empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia, for example."

Moderators have included Egyptian-American professor and civil rights activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader Kamal El-Helbawy, along with Egyptian experts in numerous fields.

"We have guest speakers from all sides of the aisle," Fathi said. "We want to give the average person all the information and all the facts, and you make a decision."

Treatment Rises, Infection Rate Falls as AIDS Reaches 30th Year

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — The number of people receiving antiretroviral (ARV) treatment to control AIDS symptoms reached a new high in 2010, and the numbers of new infections declined by 25 percent on average between the years 2001 and 2009, according to a new United Nations report.

India and South Africa, the two nations with the greatest numbers of people living with HIV/AIDS, saw an even greater decline in new infections, with India down more than 50 percent and South Africa down 35 percent. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reported these figures in a global report on the status of the disease, AIDS at 30: Nations at the crossroads.

The number of people receiving treatment has multiplied 22-fold since 2001, reaching 6.6 million in low- and middle-income countries. In 2010 alone, 1.4 million people began receiving treatment for the first time. Available since the mid 1990s, ARV treatment can allow a person with HIV to survive close to a normal lifespan of healthy and productive years. Compare that prospect to the death sentence that a person faced when diagnosed with HIV in the earliest years of the pandemic.

"Antiretroviral therapy is a bigger game-changer than ever before," said Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS executive director. "It not only stops people from dying, but also prevents transmission of HIV to women, men and children."

While there is progress to be celebrated in the global AIDS pandemic at the 30-year mark, other statistics underscore that the toll of the disease is still immense. An estimated 35 million people are living with the disease today, and an estimated 30 million have died. The percentage of people receiving treatment has reached a new high, but the numbers not receiving it are still great.

"A major treatment gap remains," according to the UNAIDS press report. Approximately 9 million people eligible for treatment at the end of 2010 did not have access. Children have lesser access than adults, with the UNAIDS report citing a 28 percent level of ARV therapy for children, contrasted to a 36 percent level of therapy being received by people of all ages.

Groups on the social fringes who have a higher vulnerability to HIV exposure are also less likely to receive ARV treatment, according to the U.N. report. These groups include intravenous drug users, men who have sex with men, sex workers and transgender people.

The rate of new infections has declined from its highs of recent years, but the number of new infections each day is about 7,000. New infections show an aggregate decline worldwide, but in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, the rate of new infections has increased, according to UNAIDS findings.

The U.N. General Assembly is holding a special session June 8-10 to assess the state of the pandemic, and to reaffirm the commitment of the U.N. community to fighting the pandemic.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton issued a statement in recognition of the 30th anniversary, emphasizing the U.S. commitment to overcoming the disease, as demonstrated through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, PEPFAR, which has provided ARV treatment for more than 3.2 million people.

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